



How to write a successful book proposal

AUTHOR DIRECTIONS

Welcome

A book proposal is a document which provides an initial overview of a book or open access book project. Sometimes a full manuscript is ready at this stage, but a book proposal is still necessary.

Your proposal will initially be read by an Editor to assess the suitability of your book project for their publishing program (or “list”). Your proposal may also undergo a review process in which reviewers are engaged to provide feedback that can be used to develop the project from proposal to finalized manuscript. Understanding these elements will increase the likelihood of a publisher offering you a contract, whilst saving you time and effort when it comes to writing/editing your book.

To help you prepare your book proposal, we have collected tips from our global books editorial team and put them into this free handy guide.

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Topic

“

Explain why the topic is important in today's climate; tie it into events in the news; recent scholarly discussions in journals etc.

”

– Ellen Boyne
EDITOR, ROUTLEDGE

First and foremost, it is essential to explain the topic of the book and demonstrate why it's relevant and important. This can be substantiated via different means – quantitatively, it's possible to illustrate the importance of a scholarly topic by looking at measures like citations, course/module numbers, and numbers of related publications. In many cases, it will also be useful to examine how the topic intersects with different disciplines and assess the extent to which there are different schools of thought at play.



Audience

“

Understanding your motives for writing will influence your route to publication and shape your work for the right audience.

”

— Natalja Mortensen

SENIOR EDITOR, ROUTLEDGE

Working on an adapted Anna Karenina principle, all successful scholarly books are alike in the same way – their authors understand their audience. Thus, a key element of a book proposal involves identifying the primary audience for the book. Books which successfully reach a wide variety of audiences are rare indeed.

To simplify this question, let's look at three core audiences:

1. **Scholars:** this audience includes advanced students, early career and established researchers. Such readers actively search for relevant new material in their specialist areas – how do you ensure your book appeals to them?
2. **Students:** this audience are only likely to buy a book if it is recommended for their class – in this case, appealing to the lecturer/instructor is as important as appealing to the student:
 - An instructor will ask themselves whether a textbook will fit their course, whether the level will be appropriate, and whether assigning the textbook will save them time
 - A student will ask whether the book is required reading and even if so, whether they really need their own copy!
3. **Practitioners:** this audience is more disparate, and can be trickier to reach – ask yourself whether your book will genuinely offer a service to this readership that's not available elsewhere.

Beyond this simple understanding of core audiences, there is potential for crossover. It's best to be honest about whether and how your book can appeal to more than one audience.

Some books travel better than others. As a global publisher, we are keen to exploit our strengths and sell the book internationally. If there are key regions where your book is likely to succeed, now's the time to highlight that and explain why an audience in a specific territory will find your book valuable.

Open access titles have the benefit of being more discoverable as the online version will be available to anyone with an internet connection. So, if your proposal is for an open access title, let the publisher know where your work would make the most impact.

“

Publishers are slightly suspicious of anything that has no competition – it begs the question as to why not and if there is in fact a market for the book.

”

– Jo Koster

SENIOR PUBLISHER, CRC PRESS

For more help defining the audience for your book, read our free guide:
3 key tips to consider when determining your book audience

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HERE TO
READ**



Position

“

Don't be afraid to take on established competition which has not kept up with the needs of the market. A well-timed, well-researched competitor can be the death of neglected titles.

”

— Jo Koster

SENIOR PUBLISHER, CRC PRESS

Demonstrating an understanding of the position that your book will take in the market will significantly enhance its likelihood of success. This involves having an awareness of what is already available to readers, amplified by a clear expression of what makes your book different from this crowd. In many cases, it is useful to think of the existing literature as “competition”.

An assessment of your competition can be broken down as follows:

1. **Literature review**

- Do a thorough search – online, in bookstores and in the library
- Ask your colleagues what books they are reading or using
- Look at student feedback on existing books where available/appropriate

2. **A competition table**

- Using your literature review, list the key competing titles identifying what's unique about them alongside what makes your book different/better (written for a different audience, new approach, etc.)
- Include basic bibliographic details for each book (publisher, price, publication year)

3. For a practitioner-oriented book, investigate whether potential readers of your book could use a solution other than a book to solve the problem addressed by your own work

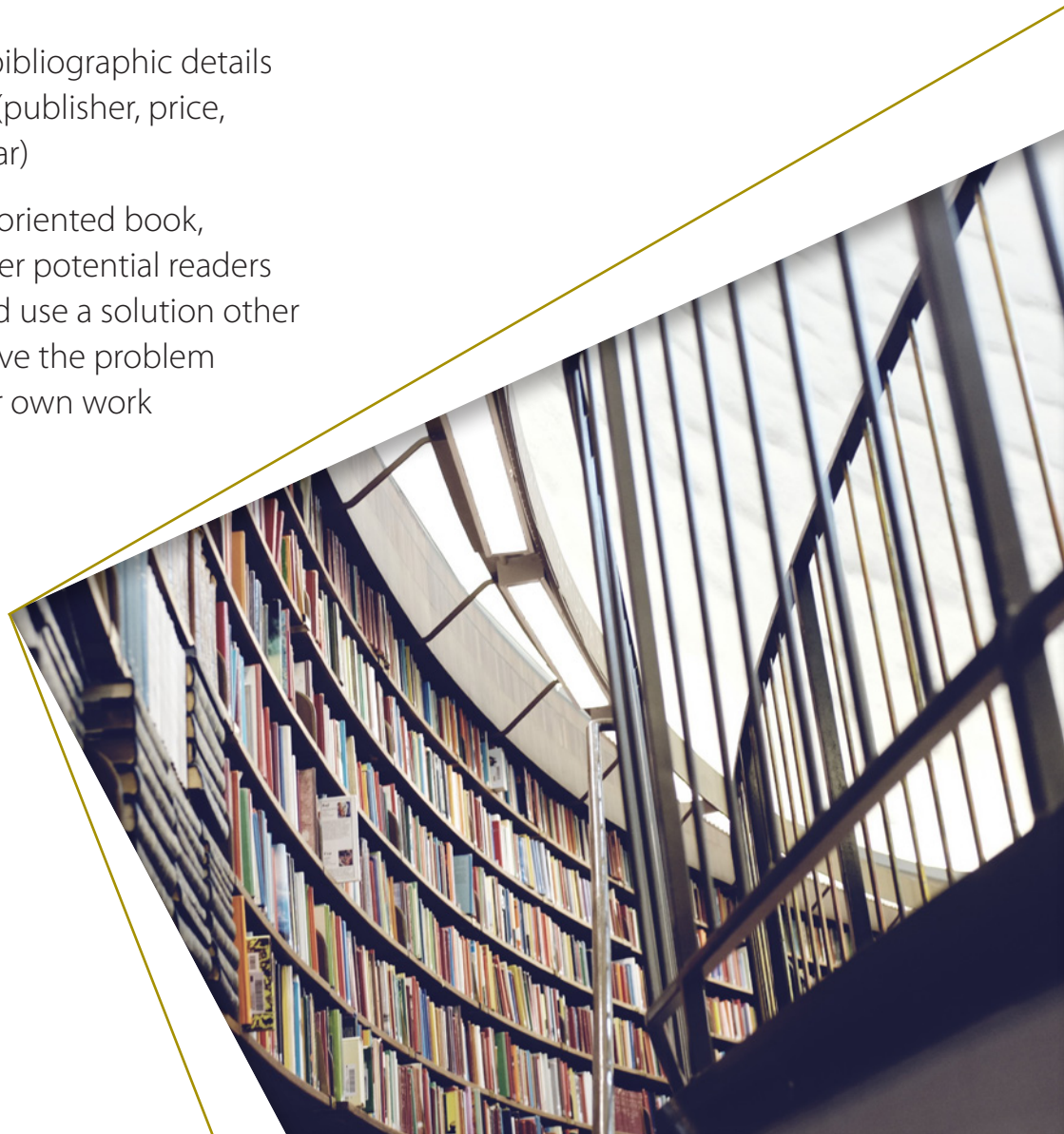
“

Be sure to recommend books within the last 5-10 years.

”

– Marc Gutierrez

EDITOR, CRC PRESS



Structure

“

For both single authored books and edited books, brief chapter abstracts are required. These may be all that the reviewer has to go on, so please provide a good indication of the proposed content.

”

— Matt Friberg
EDITOR, ROUTLEDGE

As Vladimir Nabokov once said, “style and structure are the essence of a book.” Taking into consideration the topic, audience and position of the book, its structure is arguably an author’s main tool to achieve its aims. Significant and ongoing changes to the market driven by digital disruption — notably in reader behaviour — are important to keep in mind when formulating a draft structure:

1. Chapter titles should, where possible, position themselves clearly to enhance the overall discoverability of the book.

2. Supplementing the table of contents with chapter synopses will ensure you are keeping topic, audience and position in mind and will provide reviewers with sufficient material to supply useful feedback.
3. Consistency is key – chapter features such as introductions and summaries should be included across the board, or not at all.
4. Pedagogical features are a tool to engage and retain readers faced with information overload – boxes, case studies, and illustrations should be considered.
5. Contributor details (even if tentative) should be supplied at proposal stage as this helps illustrate international and disciplinary coverage.
6. A sample chapter, though not always necessary, can help assess writing style and ensure that feedback can be provided to tie the book proposal to its execution.

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Your Proposal

“

Treat your proposal as an advertisement for you, your ideas and what you have to offer. It should grab attention and make your proposition attractive.

”

— Natalja Mortensen

SENIOR EDITOR, ROUTLEDGE

The mission of a good publisher is to connect authors with readers. The advice in this guide hopefully facilitates that, but a conversation with the relevant editor is often a vital stage to bring together your subject expertise with their publishing expertise.

From the perspective of the editor, such conversations can be key to sharpening your proposal in a few key areas:

1. **Title:** The main title of the book should position it clearly without reference to other bibliographic information and should be as short as feasible.

2. **Length:** Often book proposals are just a few pages in length, supplemented in some cases by more information on authors and/or a sample chapter.
3. **Review:** The review process is a tool to ensure that a resulting book finds its audience.
4. **Data:** Quantifiable data on citations, course sizes, and other areas can be very helpful.
5. **Presentation:** Take the time to check spelling and grammar. Use simple formatting and traditional fonts and provide it in Word, not as a PDF.
6. **Format:** If your book is open access, make this clear in your proposal

“

Use simple formatting and traditional fonts. Don't get 'fancy'.

”

– Ellen Boyne

EDITOR, ROUTLEDGE

Having provided you with the key tips, it's perhaps useful to reflect on the publisher's perspective when it comes to features of book proposals that tend to sound alarm bells. Here are a few examples:

What authors say	What publishers hear
"My book has no competition."	"I have not researched the market." "There is no market for my book."
"My manuscript is complete."	"I do not wish to engage with constructive criticism." "I want you to read my entire manuscript, but I will not make any changes."
"The book will be read by everybody."	"The book will be read by nobody."
"The book will appeal to students, researchers and practitioners."	"The book will disappoint students, researchers and practitioners."

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Conclusion

In summary, remember to think about the following areas when you put together your book proposal:

4 key tips on how to write a successful book proposal

1. **TOPIC** Ensure your book's subject is cutting-edge and important.
2. **AUDIENCE** Know the audience for your book and exactly how your book is relevant to that audience.
3. **POSITION** Understand the market, how your book sits alongside existing literature, and what makes your book unique.
4. **STRUCTURE** Be clear, concise, and consistent when you present the ideas for your book to your publisher.

If you consider these points, you should be well on your way to writing a successful proposal.

And a final piece of advice...

All stages in the publishing process are a huge commitment – do not underestimate the time it will take to write a book. Often, it takes at least a year, with contributed books going at the rate of the slowest contributor. You'll be expected to take a very active part in all processes, as well as marketing pre- and post-publication. Best to think of it as a partnership.



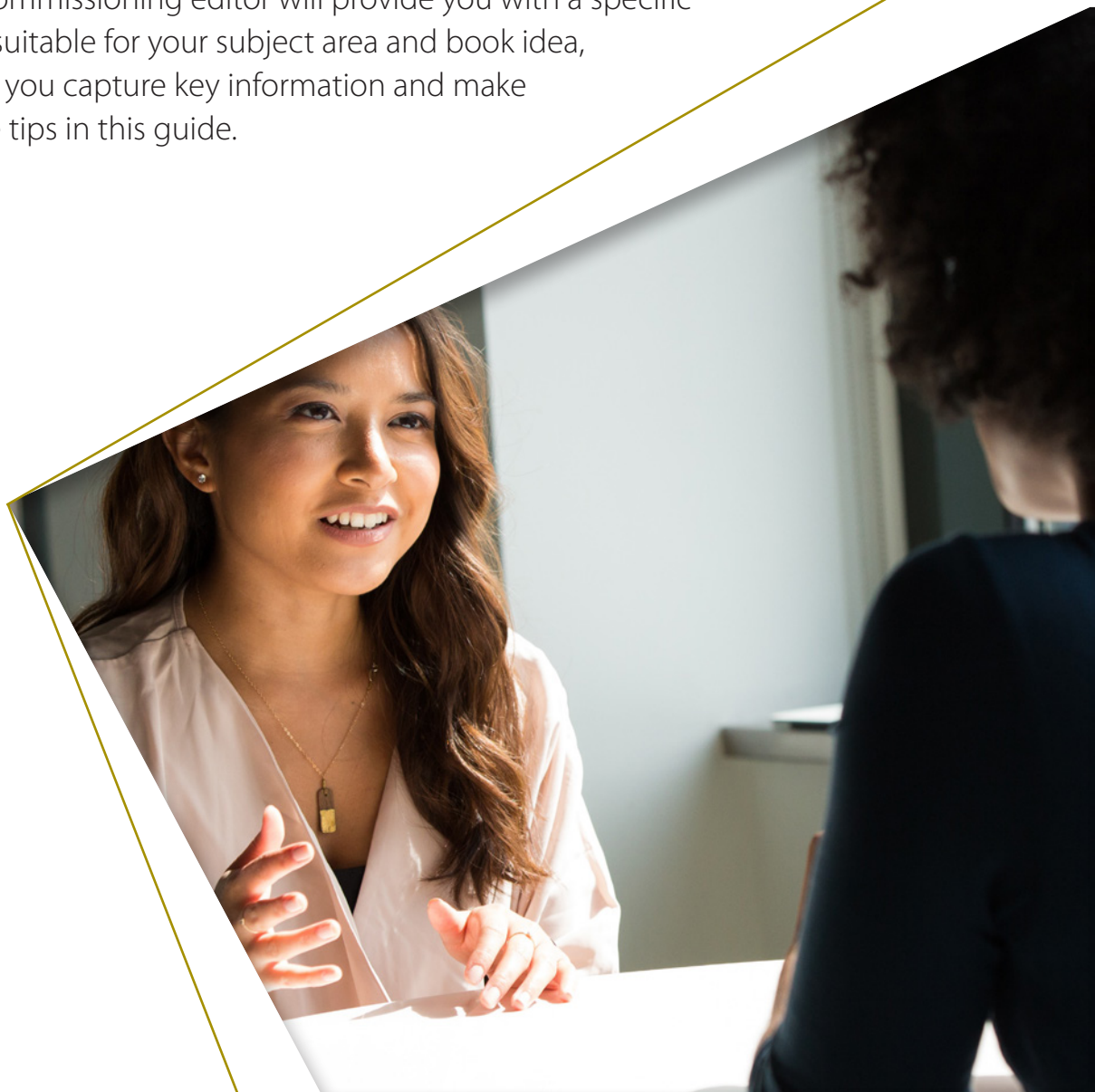
Next Steps

For more information about the Taylor & Francis book publishing process, please go to the [Publishing Guidelines help page on our website](#), where you'll find everything you need to know about the Taylor & Francis book publishing process, including quick guides (for example on the book publishing process, our products, customers and readers), forms, checklists and more.

Would you like to chat with one of our expert editors about your book idea?

Then please [complete this short form](#) and we'll put you in contact.

Assuming your proposal is suitable and aligns with our publishing framework, a commissioning editor will provide you with a specific proposal form suitable for your subject area and book idea, which will help you capture key information and make the most of the tips in this guide.



Thank You
for reading

